

Bobby

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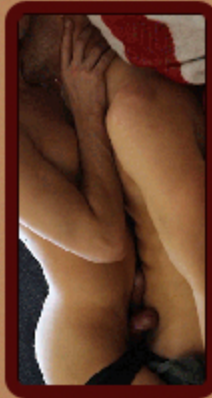
by [TigerPrawn](#)

Summary

The young lord is meant to be keeping out of trouble by working in the stables for the summer before he leaves for University.



AO3: TigerPrawn



Bobby

The scent of blossom outside was so strong that it carried over that of the hay and horseflesh within the empty stable.

“Michael,” Robert groaned as the man behind him kissed the back of his neck. The press of their naked bodies together on the balmy summer’s day added to the sheen of sweat that covered them both. Michael moved again, and Robert braced himself against the stall door, his feet shuffling in the hay underfoot in the empty stall.

He let his head fall forward against his arms as Michael moved slowly within him, gently thrusting.

“Bobby,” Michael muttered against his shoulder, pleasure sliding over them as they savoured the moment.

Neither of them spoke about how much time they had left. How little of the summer was left to them. How, soon, everything would change.

Before.

Robert Devereux, son of the Earl of Essex and inline for his title, was considered by many to be a brattish sort of a lad. Not spoiled, the Earl would never have allowed that, but a bit of a know it all, and very aware of his own attractiveness. He had been so since his early teens when he had both girls and boys fawning over him on the playground of the private school his parents paid astronomical amounts to keep him. All in the hopes that it will pave the way for Oxford or Cambridge in his future.

With a place secured at Oxford University for the coming academic year, the family's desire had been to keep him out of trouble at least until then.

A week after the end of the school year, Robert was either hiding away reading or underfoot on their large estate. In the end, the Earl charged his son with finding something practical to occupy himself with for the summer.

Robert had always enjoyed riding, he had learned young and had his own horse stabled, that he would miss whilst away at university. It seemed a natural option that he could just spend his time at the stables, or at the least hide away there smoking and reading. Maybe have Henry Wriothesley come over and give him a blow job. The Earl of Southampton's son was always up for no strings fun.

The plan seemed so perfect.

He simply hadn't factored in the new stable manager, Michael Kohlhaas.

Until the commotion of his arrival occurred, Robert had quite forgotten that old Smithy was being replaced. The old stable manager had been past it for years, but his family had been too kind to fire him. Finally, he had retired, and the Earl had hired Kohlhaas, who had previously been a horse breeder, not just to manage the stables but to help with the production of their own stock. Within weeks the place would likely be a hive of activity as it was committed to his father's latest entrepreneurial venture - horseflesh.

The day Kohlhaas arrived, Robert was sitting in the hay loft above the few stalls, only two of which contained horses at that point. He anticipated Kohlhaas bringing in more by the end of the summer. Robert had quickly stubbed his cigarette into the little ashtray that sat in the small nest he'd carved out for himself, and then leaned over to spectate.

Michael Kohlhaas, was by far and away, the most attractive man Robert had ever laid eyes on. That much was completely undeniable. And whilst he couldn't quite hear the quiet conversation between Kohlhaas and Smithy, his French accent stood out and sent a little shiver down into Robert's belly.

Apparently he lingered too long, because Kohlhaas spotted him and frowned.

Smithy went quiet and looked at his feet, not wanting to rat out the Earl's son.

“You, boy, what are you doing up there?” He growled angrily and started towards the ladder up into the loft.

“Fuck,” Robert muttered softly, putting his book into his bag, he had his pack of cigarettes in hand when Kohlhaas was suddenly there, his hand gripping tight around Robert’s wrist.

“Hey!” Robert cried out, more with indignation than pain.

Kohlhaas snatched the packet from his hand and then released him but held out his empty hand, “Lighter? Matches? Don’t you realise this place could go up like kindling?” The words were growled and Robert tried to ignore the little thrill that sent through him. He might be angry, but the attention the man gave him, the intense glare, was quite thrilling.

“I...” Robert started, about to protest with his face flushed with embarrassment and anger.

But Kohlhaas grabbed him again and hauled him to his feet. “You work here?”

Robert blinked, realising this was his chance to still hang around the stables until September. Either as the annoying son of the lord, or... He shook his head, “No, I just help out sometimes. When Smithy struggled.”

Smithy who thankfully seemed to have left the stables, though Robert was sure he wouldn’t refute it.

“You live in the village?” Kohlhaas’ eyes narrowed but Robert nodded all the same.

“I’m free over the summer, sir. I could come help out as much as you need. Smithy was uh, teaching me all about horses. So I could maybe work with them in the future. I go to University in September.”

The anger seemed to ebb in Kohlhaas a little as Robert spoke, and he relaxed his hold though didn’t release him completely.

“Fine. I’m happy to honour any arrangement he had with you.” Kohlhaas growled and dropped his hold, turning from Robert and back towards the ladder. “But no more smoking around the stables. I’ll not have a fire on my hands for your foolhardiness.”

“Yes, sir.” Robert agreed, trying to sound as meek as his usual temperament allowed.

Kohlhaas looked back at him as he took to the ladder, “Get home. I’ll see you back here at 7am.”

Robert nodded keenly and watched the man descend, taking a moment to enjoy the way his muscles worked under his shirt. He sure was going to be a more interesting acquaintance than Smithy ever had been.

Later.

Robert had never told him.

Over the weeks that they grew close. Working together every day, both laying out and reading on the grass during breaks. They talked and found they enjoyed each other's company. And Robert wasn't fool enough to miss the increasingly glances from the man. The ones that were the same as his own had been from the beginning.

There was an attraction between them that was hard to ignore, as much as they tried. When Michael handed him off a saddle, they had stood there for a moment too long. Looking into each other's eyes. Their bodies would have been pressed together but for the tack between them.

Michael's glances had started as shy, but undeniable. After that day they lingered and were filled with a lust that they had both silently acknowledged and not acted upon.

It was a lunch break in early August and Robert lay on his front on the grassy hill next to the stables and alongside the paddock. The horses cantered around playfully in the warm sun. He ate the sandwich that had been prepared for him, and enjoyed the sun on his back. Intensely aware that Kohlhaas approached even before he took a seat on the hillock, just out of arm's reach.

Robert heard Kohlhaas huff, grumbling something under his breath. Likely annoyed that Robert hadn't finished cleaning the tack before taking his break.

Robert looked up with a smirk, knowing that Michael was watching him even before he did so, "How can I read when you look at me like that?"

"How do I look at you?" Kohlhaas rumbled the words and then swallowed.

"As if you are deciding whether to eat me." Robert joked and sat up, the action putting him in range of Kohlhaas. In fact it was only a short distance to close. He leaned forward and pressed his lips to the older man's.

He didn't want to play games anymore, not when the attraction was clearly mutual and the summer was growing shorter. Kohlhaas was clearly not going to make the first move.

And, for a moment, it seemed Kohlhaas was going to kiss him back, but then instead pulled away, placing a hand on Robert's chest.

"What are you doing?" The words were gruff, but pained. It sounded like he was saying and doing what he knew he should, rather than what he desired.

"I... I thought you were interested. My mistake." Robert shrugged, trying not to show the hurt it caused him. He'd lost his virginity at fifteen and wasn't at all a stranger to flings. He had never wished for something serious, never felt anything even when the other person might. The rejection shouldn't hurt as much as it did. But then, he'd never really been close with anyone like this before.

His reputation as a heartbreaker had been well earned, and now he was sure he knew how it felt. It hadn't been his intention, but he realised in that moment quite how much he'd come to care for the man who had been his daily companion for weeks.

When Robert went to stand, he felt a hand circle his wrist and hold him in place, much like it had at their first meeting. He could feel the electricity between them.

Kohlhaas sighed heavily, "I'm too old for you."

Robert chuckled, "I've had older. Besides, I'm not looking for a marriage proposal, just some fun before university." He smirked again, trying to be his usual playful self.

Kohlhaas swallowed. "I can't do that."

His gaze was so intense that Robert wanted to look away. His chest tightened and he knew then for absolute sure that Michael Kohlhaas felt the same way he did.

He moved forward, cautiously, straddled the man's lap and laced his hands around the back of his neck. They continued to look into each other's eyes and Kohlhaas didn't seek to move him off.

"Let's just enjoy this time we have together, we have a month. Let's just have this month, just for us. No strings, no promises." Robert told him in a tone that brooked no argument. He had been happy to not get his way whilst he played at the stables like he was simply a village boy. But in this he was going to be a brat.

He knew he'd won before Kohlhaas nodded. He knew by the way the man's hands slid up his back in a gentle caress.

Presently.

Robert had lost count of the amount of times they had done this - fucking in one of the stalls or up in the hay loft when the couple of new stable hands were off lunging the horses.

There were days when it was just the two of them entirely, and whilst working they could share gentle touches and hungry looks.

He had taken to calling his lover Michael. Only Mr Kohlhaas or sir when he was being particular bratty.

And Michael called him Bobby.

It made his heart melt. Something just for them, just between them. He had only ever been Robert to most, Robbie as a child to his mother and siblings, though his father hated it.

For Michael he was Bobby, a boy from the village, soon to leave for university. Such a pleasant fiction that he never wanted it to end. He didn't want to lose the feel of the man inside him, thrusting gently as they braced against a stall door. Kissing down his back.

Making love to him, as much as they both might want to pretend it was simply fucking.

"Hallo?" A voice called out from outside the stable. One that Robert instantly recognised.

Michael drew from him so quickly that Robert winced at the sensation, and immediately both of them were trying to locate enough of their clothes to not be caught in the act.

“Henry?” Robert called out.

“Robert, where the hell are you?” Henry called back and they heard him trying the main stable door latch.

Robert finished buttoning his fly and pulled the t-shirt over his head, hoping that Henry wouldn't spot his lack of shoes. He raced from the stall and to the main door of the stable, leaving Michael behind him to continue dressing.

“There you are,” Henry grinned as Robert opened the top half of the door, sunlight streaming in around his schoolmate. “Your father said you'd be up here.” He frowned around him, at the door and the fact that Robert was seemingly locked up inside. “Hiding from someone?”

Robert laughed, “Yes, the dogs. We're trying to muck out but they kept getting underfoot.”

Henry cocked a brow and looked back out to the yard, seeing the Earl's three gun dogs laid out lazing in the sun.

He waved a dismissive hand, “Well, anyway. My father has come for tea, yours wants us to join them. Like civilised people.” Henry wrinkled his nose, insinuating that Robert stank. “If we head back now you can shower before the cook has even finished cutting the cucumber sandwiches.”

Robert rolled his eyes. Partly for effect, but actually because it was the last thing he wanted to do. Not just because he wanted to carry on letting his lover take him in the stable for the rest of the afternoon, but because he preferred Michael's company over any others on offer.

“Really, Robert.” Henry scalded, “This isn't the place for the son of the Earl. Surely your father could have fixed you up with something in the city. Or did he insist that you make your own way?” Henry rolled his eyes.

“Something like that,” Robert laughed. “You go on ahead. I just need to lock this place up and I'll catch you up.”

Henry gave a long suffering roll of his eyes and a nod before starting back in the direction of the manor house.

Once Robert was sure Henry was leaving, he jogged back to the stall only to find it empty but for his boots.

“Michael?” There was no answer, and that filled him with no small amount of dread over what Michael might have heard. With a heavy heart, he pulled on his boots and went after Henry.

*

Robert didn't go back to the stable the next day, too concerned with what Michael had inevitably heard.

He wasn't sure what to say, or what he wanted.

He didn't want things to end with Michael in this way. He wasn't sure he wanted them to end at all, but that was out of his hands no matter how he sliced it. Inevitably, it felt that he either had to say something or just stay away until he went to university, and that wasn't an option he liked. So it was the following day that he finally returned to the stables.

Robert took a deep breath and stood at the stable door, the day was balmy but overcast, a summer storm coming in. Which felt absolutely fitting. He placed his hand on the door, about to pull it open and look for Michael, when a voice from behind startled him.

"Is it true? What your friend said?" He turned and Kohlhaas looked at him sternly. He was angry, which was understandable.

"Henry?" Robert swallowed, knowing of course that it could be no other, as much as he wanted to hope that Michael hadn't heard their conversation.

Kohlhaas waved a dismissive hand at the name, and continued to growl out the words, "Your father is the Earl? You're Robert Deveraux. Is that true? Son of the Earl? Of my employer?"

Robert bit at his lower lip, eyes downcast. Contrite. Which was something he'd never once been before in his life.

"I hadn't meant to lie to you."

"And yet you did," Michael frowned and clenched his fists. But Robert could see it was hurt just as much as anger.

"It was your mistake and I should have corrected you. But... I liked that you didn't treat me like my father's son."

Kohlhaas made an anguished sort of sound and threw up his hands in exasperation, "You liked that I fucked you." He spat out a few more words in French and pushed his hands through his hair. "What a fool I was."

"And you wouldn't have fucked me? If you knew who I was? We wouldn't have had this..." Robert couldn't name the thing between them, it was too raw and the words trailed off. "But it was okay if I was someone else?"

"Of course!" Michael snapped. "I wouldn't have laid a hand on you. Was this some sort of game to you? Playing at a damn Victorian romance or something? What we were doing, when you were just a boy from the village, was bad enough. But the son of the Lord? The man who pays my wages? I could get fired. I could never work again!"

That much Robert could understand, his father had crushed many people in the past.

“I would never let that happen!” Robert insisted, despite knowing his father would likely not listen to anything he had to say on the subject.

Michael knew that too, from the way he scoffed and shook his head.

He walked away, and Robert knew Michael didn’t want him to follow.

*

A week passed and Robert mostly kept to his room, despite the heat that had settled since the storm. He had the windows open to circulate the air, and sometimes fancied he could hear the horses whinny on the breeze, despite how far off the stables were.

There was a knock at his door, he ignored it. But then it was followed by a more demanding knock and Henry on the other side declaring, “I’m coming in Robert so you better be presentable. Or not if you prefer,” Henry chuckled and opened the door.

The Earl of Southampton's son walked slowly over to the bed, no doubt taking in the sight of him. He hadn’t shaved in a few days, his light stubble making his unruly hair look all the messier. His father had already told him at breakfast the morning before that he looked like a vagrant.

“Dear lord, the state of you!” Henry scoffed at him and then made himself comfortable at the end of the bed, reclining back on his elbows. “This about that horse fella?”

“What?” Robert snapped and glared at Henry, wishing the fool would leave.

“I went to the stables looking for you and found the grumpy arse your dad has hired for his new pet project. Wasn’t too happy to see me. Even less so when he told me you were up at the house and I said I’d just come up here and give you a cheer up blow job.” Henry chuckled.

Robert sat bolt upright in the bed, “You did what?”

Henry laughed, “Oh, you look as upset as he did. I assume you’ve been fucking then? It’s a bit Lady Chatterley isn’t it? Explains why he was so mad. I ended up having to use the whole, *don’t you know who I am* bit.”

“You’re an ass Southampton,” Robert growled as he got up from the bed, pulling off his t-shirt to throw on a fresh one.

He didn’t care what happened from here on, but he couldn’t have Michael thinking that there was something with Henry. Or with anyone. No matter what happened, he had to let Michael know how he felt.

*

“Michael,” Robert called out as he approached the stable, seeing the man walking outside and leading a horse to the paddock.

He ignored the young lord, continuing as though he hadn't heard him, though there was no way he couldn't have.

"Please," Robert's word came out more angry than pleading. And that caught Michael's attention.

"What do you want, sir?" Michael spat, pulling the horse up short enough to make it huff in annoyance.

Robert winced, coming to a stop next to Michael and the horse.

"I didn't mean to sound... I'm just frustrated with this. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter that you're sorry. It doesn't matter that you didn't tell me. It's all in the past." Michael replied gruffly, he started to move forward but Robert stepped closer, in front of the horse, who gave another annoyed huff.

"Please, Michael..."

Michael's jaw tightened and he scowled at Robert.

"Don't call me that."

"Please," Robert repeated. This time it did sound like a plea, "Henry told me what he said, I know you are angry. But I need you to know that nothing has happened between he and I in a very long time. When I was seeing you, it was just you. I know you don't trust me."

Michael huffed and shook his head. "You lied to me Robert, about who you are!"

"No!" Robert growled, insisting now and stepping into Michael's space. "I never did! You assumed and I never corrected you."

"Because you knew it would be wrong if we-" Michael started but Robert cut him off.

"I just wanted you to treat me like a normal person!" Robert snapped, angry tears pricking the corners of his eyes, that he was determined not to shed.

They both went quiet, only the sounds of theirs and the horse's breathing.

"I just wanted to be Bobby." Robert said quietly, looking down at his feet and prepared to leave. He had humiliated himself for one summer.

As he started to move away, Michael reached for him, pulling him back until he was nestled in his arms.

Michael took in a heavy breath, let out a sigh and nuzzled into Robert's curls.

"I just want you to be Bobby too," Michael replied quietly, "But you're not. We can't pretend otherwise."

"We can," Robert insisted, but he felt Michael shaking his head.

"How can I treat you as I had, knowing who you are? I already knew this would need to end when the summer ended. You needed to move on with your life and with university. I made my peace with that. But you are the son of the Earl, can't you see the risk?"

"Please," Robert buried his face in Michael's shirt, his eyes stinging. He wasn't someone who considered themselves weak. He knew he never stepped down from an argument. But there was so much at stake with this one.

He was falling in love with Michael. *Had* fallen in love with him, and this was breaking his heart.

"Please," Robert said again and lifted his face, pushing it up to Michael's jaw and kissing there, kissing up his stubble and to his mouth. His own stubble scratchy against Michael's.

Michael groaned and Robert knew that their desire for each other was equally ferocious no matter what Michael said.

Robert let out a quiet and startled cry when Michael suddenly set him aside and then strode to the paddock. The horse had to break to a trot to keep up, making appreciative noises as Michael slid its headgear off and let it free in the paddock.

The look of determination on Michael's face was breathtaking as he strode back, collected Robert up in his arms and headed back into the stable.

He didn't set Robert down again until they were inside, growling out "Hay loft," as he started to bolt up the stable doors.

Robert's heart was beating frantically as he nodded and rushed to the ladder, heading up into the loft where they had spent hours together making love, or just curled around each other talking, reading. Being intimate in a number of ways that Robert was sure he'd never truly have with anyone else.

He was breathing heavily when Michael caught him at the top of the ladder. He turned in Michael's arms and the mouths instantly pressed together.

Robert moaned and clutched his hands tight in the front of Michael's shirt, even as Michael's hands went down to start unbuttoning his trousers. Robert moaned his encouragement, shuddering when Michael slipped his hand inside his trousers and grasped Robert's thickening cock in his rough hand.

"Please," Robert's word was more forceful this time, and they both knew what he was asking for.

Michael grunted and walked them to the little nest that they had made there of old blankets. Laying Robert gently onto it before sitting back to pull at both their trousers. He didn't stop

until both were down to their thighs and he lowered himself over Robert and took his mouth in a passionate kiss, whilst rutting against him.

Robert groaned into the kiss as their lengths pressed together. After everything that had happened, he knew he could come from this alone and hoped that Michael was as close as he was.

"Bobby," Michael moaned, drawing back enough for his hair to fall loose, his fringe a mess.

Bobby whimpered and Micheal reached between them, wrapping his hand around them both and starting to stroke slowly.

Even that was a little too much, given how aroused he was, and Bobby gasped.

The gasp was swallowed into another kiss as Michael began to work them both together, harder and faster until Robert had to break the kiss to cry out.

"Michael, I..." Robert stopped himself from saying something stupid a moment before he groaned and his whole body tightened. His balls drew up and he spilled all over Michael's hand and his own belly.

Michael moaned at the sight and slowed his strokes, pushing Robert through the aftershocks of his climax as he then reached his own. He grunted and rested his forehead against Robert's as he emptied himself completely.

Robert felt the hot, wet spill of it and choked out a sob. His need for this to happen was palpable.

They panted together for several minutes, as Michael still held himself up, before finally moving to Robert's side to catch his breath.

Long pulls of oxygen filled the air of the barn. The sounds of the horses and birds outside making it seem like any other day. But it wasn't.

That was made all the more clear when Michael spoke softly, "Just this one time. This was the last time. It has to be."

"Until when..." Robert started, turning his head to look at Michael, When he saw the look in his eyes, he knew Michael meant last time ever.

"You're young. You have your whole life ahead of you-" Michael began, stopping when Robert let out a scoffing laugh.

"You're only ten years older than me." Robert countered, "And it's not like I'm a child."

"A lot can happen in ten years. When you are my age you'll wonder why you trapped yourself with me."

Robert swallowed, he didn't agree, but he understood Michael's thoughts.

“You will meet someone at university. Perhaps many someones. And perhaps one day you will settle down with one of them, or someone else entirely. But you are eighteen now. Now is not a time to settle. This was always going to have to end, Bobby. You know that. We both knew it.”

Robert let out a heavy breath and Michael pulled him into an embrace.

“One last time,” Robert agreed. “But... when I graduate. In three years time, when I’m older and wiser and have fucked half the department if I so wished. Maybe then if we are both single, and this attraction between us is still there. Maybe we can go on a date.” It wasn't a question so much as a fact.

Michael chuckled and pulled Robert tighter to his chest, clearly not expecting at all that it would become a reality, but all the same he agreed, “Yes. Three years and then we’ll see.”

He pressed a kiss to Bobby’s hair.

Three Years Later

Robert sat in his seat, his leg jiggling.

He’d already been up for his degree certificate and now was waiting for the remainder of the ceremony to conclude.

He wasn’t alone in his impatience. Most in the room felt the same way. Firstly, because it turns out that graduation ceremonies are long and boring. And secondly, there were all number of parties being held afterwards.

Most students had family at the ceremony and would likely be doing as he was and going for some sort of celebratory dinner after. But then in the evening there would be many activities happening.

But that wasn’t what Robert was waiting for, what he was looking forward to.

He flexed his fingers over his pocket, feeling the letter there. The reply he had received from Michael when he wrote a month earlier.

They had written sporadically over the years. Both careful not to write as lovers, only as friends. Friends who wished to stay in touch. They never wrote of what had been between them, or what they had agreed. They simply talked and enjoyed keeping up on each other's life.

During vacations from university in that first year, they had seen each other around the grounds but steered clear. And then Robert's father had decided he didn’t have the desire to raise his own horses after all and Michael found a job elsewhere.

He had resisted writing when Michael had moved on asking him if he wanted to be together now, now that he was no longer employed by his father. In the end he hadn't, because he knew nothing had really changed. It wasn’t just his family. He understood now what Michael’s fears were. He had partied and slept with a couple of people before he realised it

was a pale comparison that wasn't worth the energy. He had thrown himself into his studies and came out with a First. He already had a job in the city lined up for a few weeks time, one he had got on his own merit where he'd interned the summer of his second year. He had made something of himself and that had been reflected in the pride his father had. In the improved relationship between himself and his parents. He might even call himself close with his father now.

Robert had grown and matured.

And he still wanted Michael.

Robert drew in a sharp breath when he realised the ceremony was finally over. He was up on his feet so fast he knocked against his mother in the chair next to him.

"Sorry, just need to step out, to see someone."

He should have said he needed the bathroom, the ceremony had been long enough for that to be believable. And he didn't want them asking questions. But, it hadn't been thinking beyond rushing towards the exit before the bulk of the crowd started to file out.

It took Robert a few minutes to move beyond the main crowd of students and parents, searching desperately for any sign of the man. Taking a vantage point on some steps at the edge of the courtyard they were in, trying to spot Micheal in the crowd.

The letter had said maybe. When he broke it down, that was the essence of it. But he could feel the love in the man's words alongside the hesitation over what this was between them. If they allowed it.

Robert hoped the maybe was really a yes, and had written back with details of the ceremony. His graduation - the event they had agreed as the deadline for their declaration.

He swallowed and took a breath, trying to calm himself as he continued to scan the crowd, his hope starting to wane.

Everyone was out of the hall now, slowly drifting off or forming small groups in which to talk. And still he couldn't see a familiar figure walking between them all. Robert's heart sank, wishing he could have at least seen Michael one last time. He had never been ready for there to be a goodbye between them.

Robert let out a shuddering breath and started a slow walk back to where the crowds had gathered outside. It was easy to spot his parents, his mother in her vibrant yellow hat, his dad with his usual scowl. His mother waved and he nodded that he had seen them and walked slowly. His hand in his pocket, he played his finger over the letter, like the last string of a connection.

When he reached his parents it was clear from his father's frown, that something had caught the Earl's attention. He cocked his head to the side, frown easing into something more curious and muttered, "What on earth is he doing here?"

Both Robert and his mother turned to look at what the Earl was referring to.

And there in the crowd, looking around with a frown on his face, was Michael Kohlhaas.

Robert realised from the way his parents turned to him, that he must have gasped as loudly as he thought he had.

And now seeing him there, in person, everything in him screamed for him to go to the man, despite his parents being there.

Robert watched as Michael turned, starting towards another part of the crowd and away from them.

He wasn't proud of the strange whimper that escaped him then, but he didn't have time to consider it further as he started to run. He hadn't even thought about it, instinct drove him even as his parents called out after him in confusion.

"Michael!" Robert shouted through the crowd, trying to get his attention as he walked further away.

Robert dodged and weaved through students and families. Apologised to friends who tried to stop him, until finally, Michael was just up ahead.

"Michael!"

At that Michael turned, stopping still and spinning on the spot to face him. And Robert stopped too. Frozen like a deer in the headlights as Michael's face eased from a frown into a soft smile.

He was still too far to hear without shouting, too many people between them. Even so, Robert's heart burst as he saw the unmistakable word on Michael's lips - *Bobby*.

Robert ran, closing the distance between them and launching himself at his lover. Michael caught him with a laugh, Robert's graduation gown flying out behind him like a cape as he wrapped his arms around Michael's neck and then his legs around his waist.

Michael held him close, a tight embrace as they breathed together and tried to compose themselves.

"I'd still like that date." Robert said against Michael's ear, breathless.

Michael let out a shuddering breath and loosened his hold to allow Robert to move back in his arms and meet his eyes.

"Sorry, I wasn't sure I should come. I wasn't sure what future we could possibly have, but then I realised I didn't care. We could work that out together. I wanted to be able to touch you not just write to you. That was a clear sign that I had to come here, and hope that you wanted me too." Michael chuckled and let out a clearly relieved sigh.

"I want you. I always have." Robert replied and leaned in for a kiss. Michael held him tight and kissed him back with three years worth of passion.

They were still kissing when the Earl cleared his throat behind them.

"Well, this has been an interesting day. From the looks of it Mr Kohlhaas, you'd better join us for dinner. We might have a fair bit to discuss."

Michael dropped his hold and Robert slid down until he was on his feet next to him. He grabbed Michael's hand and held it tight.

His father didn't look as disapproving as he thought he might, and his mother wore a sort of *I knew it* smirk.

The Earl took in a deep breath, let it out and shook his head. "I guess this means I owe Southampton a tidy sum. For once one of the rumours Henry was spreading appears to have been true."

Robert felt his cheeks heat and he gave a firm nod, "Perhaps that's a lesson for you father, Henry isn't always stirring up trouble."

The Earl's mouth twitched into a grin at the light banter, "No, just the vast majority of the time."

He felt Michael's hand flex around his own at the mention of Henry's name.

"Though in this case, they are out of date." Michael said gruffly, and Robert could see how he puffed his chest a little when he spoke to the Earl. "I can assure you sir, I haven't seen Bobby since he left for University. As much as I dearly desired to." Michael looked at Robert then, with such affection Robert was sure he heard his mother sigh quietly.

"Bobby, is it?" The Earl raised a brow, a smile spreading over his face. "Seems like you really should come to dinner." The Earl let out the sort of sigh that Robert knew well, the *what trouble is that boy in now*, sigh. "Well, let's hope you know what you're in for."

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